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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the social ecological opportunities implied by segregated extended school year (ESY) summer programs for students with disabilities who, during the school year, attend inclusive programs in classrooms with nondisabled peers. Two primary grade students with severe multiple disabilities were observed in the classroom situation both during the regular school year (when the students were in inclusive settings) and during the ESY summer program (when the students were in a self-contained classroom program for students with severe disabilities). Profiles of each student were developed, including a section on social ecology based on vignettes of the students' social interactions during similar classroom activities in both integrated and segregated settings. These profiles were then discussed during 4 focus grups with 48 participants that included parents, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, a general education teacher, administrators, and others including case managers, social workers, and coordinators. The focus groups discussed implications of the extended school year entitlement, intended to prevent achievement regression. Most focus group members concluded that the summer school program lacked age-appropriate peers and social motivation, and supported use of integrated community-based recreation programs in the summer. (Contains 20 references.) (DB)

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Extended School Year: A Participatory Research Evaluation

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Running Head: Extended School Year

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Abstract

Litigation and professional expert opinion have supported the right to special education summer school services for students with severe disabilities, referred to as Extended School Year (ESY). Students may be eligible for ESY programming based upon a demonstrated risk for regression without continued educational services over the summer months. Because summer school is typically not available to nondisabled peers, ESY services are most likely to be segregated, handicapped-only programs which may be in sharp contrast to the kinds of inclusive opportunities available during the academic year. This paper explores the social ecological opportunities implied by segregated Extended School Year summer programs for students who, during the school year, attended inclusive programs in classrooms with their nondisabled peers. Observational data collected in both situations were used to construct student portraits, and a participatory research approach was used to solicit input from constituent focus groups asked to make recommendations for ESY services based upon their evaluations of the student portrait data. Results provide insights into issues related to summer options for Extended School Year services to prevent regression on individual student skills targeted as priority concerns for maintenance over the summer months.

Extended School Year: A Participatory Research Evaluation

Extended School Year (ESY) services have generally been established as the necessary summer component to insure the provision of a free and appropriate public education for students with severe disabilities (Lucht & Kaska, 1991). Based upon evidence that these young people would regress over a period of several summer months during which they would otherwise not receive educational and therapy services--and thus lose the very IEP objectives they had mastered during the preceding academic school year--the courts early on recognized the right of any child with disabilities demonstrated to be at risk for such regression to receive a free IEP-driven program during the summer. Because there is no such entitlement for nondisabled peers, however, it has been highly unlikely that classmates who do not have disabilities would also be attending such programs (Lucht & Kaska, 1991). Hence, summer educational programs are generally segregated, and students with severe disabilities who might otherwise attend an inclusive program with nondisabled classmates during the school year would attend a handicapped-only program during the summer.

What are the implications of attending a handicapped-only summer school program for a child who, during the year, receives his or her education in the general education classroom? Given that ESY summer programs were designed for the purpose of preventing regression of skills mastered during the year, one question that might be asked is the extent to which those programs do prevent regression on specific skills targeted on the IEP. An examination of the skills included on each individual student's IEP would provide an individual template to determine, for that child, whether the skills listed would be sufficiently reflected in a summer program to prevent regresstion. If a student's IEP emphasized social-communicative priorities

and other skills mastered within the context of activity routines with age-peers, such goals and objectives may be difficult to maintain in handicapped-only, self-contained programs. On the other hand, if the student's IEP emphasizes routines such as self-care or other functional skills typically taught outside academic and social routines, handicapped-only programs might support the maintenance of such objectives. If, as is more likely, a student's IEP would include a variety of instructional objectives, choices might have to be made regarding which of those objectives are priorities for maintenance and recoupment such that regression over the summer months would be unacceptable.

The impact of the social ecological environment of a self-contained ESY program on the child with disabilities has thus far not been formally considered in the literature on ESY programs. Opportunities available in two such markedly different social contexts could be a fundamental challenge to the provision of only segregated summer options based upon a regression-recoupment rationale. If a student's IEP provides inclusive schooling during the academic year in compliance with mandates for a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, can a segregated summer program protect that same student from regression on the student's IEP goals? In order to provide some initial data on this issue and a framework that might be useful for decision-making in such instances, we utilized a participatory research process involving relevant constituent groups in the evaluation process (Turnbull et al., 1993). Information was gathered from the relevant program environments and shared with those constituencies, who were then asked to make recommendations for Extended School Year services that would be consistent with the intent of the summer entitlement.

Method

Child Participants

Two students with severe disabilities, Eric and Susan, were the focus of the study. During the academic school year, they were enrolled full-time in an age-appropriate general education classroom, with special education services and supports delivered in that setting. Eric was 7-8 years old and attended grades 1-2 at the time of the study; he is a Latino boy, bilingual with limited English. Susan was 6-7 years old and attended grades K-1; she and her family are Arabian immigrants. Both students are diagnosed as having severe multiple disabilities, and each uses a wheelchair for mobility. Table 1 provides information on the students, including their priority IEP objectives established for the 1993-1994 school year.

Insert Table 1 about here

Prior to the beginning of data collection in spring 1993, these two students had been attending their general education classrooms throughout the school year. As nondisabled classmates did not attend summer school and these two students were eligible for ESY services, their summer program at that same school was delivered in a handicapped-only, self-contained classroom environment.

Focus Group Participants

Four Focus Groups with 48 participants included 8 parents, 8 special education teachers, 7 teacher assistants, 1 general education teacher, 5 administrators, 9 others including case mangers, social workers, and coordinators. All were interested in inclusive schooling as they

were voluntarily attending a regional conference titled "Inclusive Schools and Communities for Children and Youth." This purposeful sample was deliberately selected on the premise that children whose IEPs specified an inclusive program would likely represent family and professional school personnel who had agreed upon that placement and service as the appropriate program. The participants were asked to complete a brief information form prior to assignment to the focus groups in order to insure that each group would be heterogeneous in role representation. Each of the 4 Focus Groups included approximately 3 parents, 2 special education teachers, 1 teacher assistant, 1 administrator, and 2 "other" individuals randomly assigned to groups according to their role only and based upon the information provided on the form.

Target Subject's School and Setting

The two target children Eric and Susan attend an urban school in one of America's largest school districts. Their building had participated in a federally funded systems change project that provided ongoing technical assistance to develop and implement quality inclusive school programs for students with severe disabilities; this participation extended throughout the 1990-1992 school years. Beginning in 1993, this school became a participant in the Consortium for Collaborative Research as a school site for the examination of the social relationships and social interactions between students with and without severe disabilities who were now classmates in general education classrooms throughout the school day.

To investigate the different classroom environments experienced by the students with and without severe disabilities, direct participant observations were made to follow the school day experiences of target children (and others at the school) during spring 1993, summer school

1993, and fall 1993. During the spring and fall 1993 data collection phases, the students were enrolled full-time in inclusive school programs in age-appropriate general education classrooms; they were full participants in all classroom activities with their age-peers. As can be seen from Table 1, they thus attended two different general education classrooms during the school year. During the summer 1993 data collection phase, the students were placed in an ESY summer school program: Both attended the same self-contained classroom for students with severe disabilities. Observations were collected for a period of 6 weeks during the spring and fall data collection and for a total of 8 weeks during the summer data collection time periods.

Observation Procedures and Data Collection

Data on the school day experiences and social interactions were collected by trained participant observers from the surrounding community; the observers were African American, Latino, and European American, and were selected to "demographically represent" the school population. All were parents of nondisabled children enrolled in the school. They were paid for training, observations, and regular meetings with project staff to review procedures at a rate equivalent to other paraprofessional hourly positions at that school (e.g., the rate for a cafeteria aid). Observers were identified through school referral. Training and ongoing supervision of observers included structured training sessions, practice in data collection procedures with feedback from project personnel, and biweekly contact at the school site to monitor observation procedures and provide individualized feedback to observers based upon their transcribed data from the previous two weeks.

Observation procedures were designed to facilitate maximum fidelity to events seen through the "lens" of a member of the community of that school (i.e., participant observer). The actual

process of the observations was as follows: Observers were individually scheduled for 1-2 classrooms that became their primary responsibility. They were to become familiar with the children and staff in those rooms, and to also become familiar with various school activities and environments in which the children were involved. Each observer was thus also responsible to serve as primary observer for the target students with severe disabilities enrolled in those classrooms. Each was introduced to school personnel and the children as another adult who would be present at various times and would be available to help out occasionally (for a description of participant observation models similar to our own procedures see Gold, 1958; Gold, 1969; Bogdan & Biklen 1992; Whyte, 1979). Observers were provided with frequent guidance from project personnel and were directly supervised by the school's Inclusion Teacher, and were generally instructed to record approximately one-half of their observations focused upon interactions between nondisabled children and to attempt to collect data for one-half of their observations focused upon their target child/ren's interactions with nondisabled peers and other peers with disabilities.

Observational records began by noting particular demographic details (e.g., activity, who is present, and so on), and informal interviews with persons within the student's varied social communicative contexts would be carried out later, as needed, whenever the observer had questions or wanted more information about what was observed. A schedule was used to insure that all relevant settings and situations would be observed on a regular basis. Periodic meetings were held with all observers and 2-3 members of the project staff to discuss their observations, and clarify the events of interest, level of detail needed, answer specific questions, and provide feedback on each observer's data from previous observations. Another purpose of these meetings

was to encourage the observers to think of themselves less as "hired hands" carrying out some technical tasks for a large research project in which they had no personal investment and more as a part of a research team whose task included not only observing and dictating fieldnotes, but also making decisions and interpretations about what they were seeing. In addition to recording their "objective description" of the events they observed, observers were also encouraged to separately record their own interpretations of events. These were logged into the observations as "OC" for observer comments, and allowed the observer to relate what was just seen to events observed at another time, information relayed elsewhere, or to describe their own impressions about intent and mood based upon their own social intuitions. These procedures are consistent with qualitative research participant observation procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Gold, 1969; for more information regarding our observation procedures, see Biklen, Larson, Xin, Meyer, & Henry, 1994).

Student Portraits

Transcriptions of the observational data described above were used to construct vignettes of a student's social interactions during similar classroom activities, summarized and presented as a student portrait. Susan's portrait was 6 pages and Eric's 7 pages in length. Each portrait was organized into four major sections, and ended with three Focus Group questions. The first section was a paragraph summary of personal information about the student, written in a positive tone, including age, special skills, support needs, and a limited history of schooling experiences. The second section briefly described major IEP goals and objectives, and the third section gave an overview of current special education services and supports included on the IEP (see Table 1). The final section was entitled "Description of the social ecology or the social context for

learning" and comprised the major portion of the portrait. Each portrait ended with the Focus Group questions, described in the next section.

Susan's social ecology description included 5 incidents observed during the inclusive school year program and 4 incidents observed during the segregated summer program. A typical school year incident was as follows:

> *Susan plays at centers with a classmate after reading: The children are sitting with their teacher. They are in a circle, including Susan and Rosie, who sit in their wheelchairs. When reading is done, the children are allowed to pick what center they want to go to. Susan is being pushed by Shaniqua, who asks Susan if she wants to cook. Susan says "Yes" by shaking her head up and down and clapping her hands. As they make their way to the cooking area, there are several boys in their path. Shaniqua puts her arms out to make room for Susan and another student moves the chair. At the cooking area, Shaniqua gets Susan plates and other tools for cooking. There are several other girls at the center who make sure that Susan is included in all conversations. Observer Comment (OC): As I watched Shaniqua, I thought these two little girls really like one another. I felt that Shaniqua wanted to make Susan part of everything she did in class.*

A parallel entry for the summer school program read as follows:

> *Susan and her classmates were also provided learning center time. After breakfast, we went back to the classroom. After everyone was [assisted with bathroom routines] and homework was checked, the class was allowed to go to different centers: Block center, cooking center, drawing center, and a cutting center. Of course, Susan wanted to go to*

the cooking center, but [the teacher assistant] wanted her to come to the cutting center to make a pig out of paper plates and construction paper. At first, Susan didn't want to go with [the TA]. She started to make noises and move her head back and forth. But [the TA] told her, "You cut, then you go." After that, there was no more problem. She went with [the TA].

I got over to the cooking center where Eric already was. [The TA] gave Susan dishes and other things. For instance, pots and pans, spoons, and play food. Eric just sat at the center, looking. There was no interaction, no touching or talking among Eric and Susan. Susan started calling out with different sounds and whining. [The TA] asked what was wrong with her. Susan just looked at her.

Eric's social ecology description included 4 entries for the inclusive school year program and 6 for the segregated ESY program. An entry for Eric's inclusive school year program read as follows:

During a math lesson in first grade: [The general education teacher] had some math examples on the board. She stopped what she was doing and she asked the class to pay attention and put down what they were doing. Eric was sitting next to [the TA] who is the bilingual TA...and also next to Eric, on the other side, was a little boy named Jose [a general education classmate]. As [the general education teacher] was explaining what to do, [the TA] was showing Eric his work in his book. Observer Comment (OC): Each of the two children [with disabilities] have the complete set-up that all the other children have, their workbooks, their notebooks, and whatever.

[The general education teacher] was asking for answers as they were working in their

math books. I remember it, at one point this little boy that was sitting next to Eric, his name was Jose, he gave an answer to one of the math problems, and the answer was four, the number four. I looked over at Eric and.... He tried to repeat the number "four." He actually was mouthing the number "four."

A typical entry for Eric's ESY summer program was:

Eric and his classmates during a music activity: [The TA] comes in for music.... Even Jason, who is usually running around the room, sat in his chair and listened to the music. [The TA] played music, classic, pop, and children's songs on her keyboard that she brought with her. Observer Comment (OC): I could not believe the way the class took to the music. They sat still, but you could see in their expressions they enjoyed the music. Susan even tried to sing along.

Every time the music stopped, Susan and Eric would start making noises and move around in their chairs. Observer Comment (OC): I guess this was their way of saying "More music."

Procedures for the Focus Group Meetings

The participatory research session began with a brief introduction, by the third author, to the legal entitlement of Extended School Year Services for students with disabilities. Participants had chosen to attend the session and were informed that they would be asked to review information for selected target students with severe disabilities to solicit their interpretations regarding the likelihood that the program options described would meet the regression-recoupment criteria that was the basis for the ESY entitlement. They were also told that they would be asked to make suggestions for future ESY program options, and that their

input would be incorporated into future efforts by the state's systems change project in selected districts. The actual procedures for the Focus Group activity were modeled after Krueger (1994). After being given time to read their assigned portraits, Focus Group participants were asked to respond to 3 questions in their group discussion:

1. In addition to the special education services provided to Susan/Eric during the summer, do you think that her/his social environment will have an effect on maintaining her/his IEP goals? In what ways?

2. Given that the Extended School Year (ESY) entitlement is for the purpose of preventing regression on IEP goals, is Susan's/Eric's summer program likely to do this? Why or why not?

3. In your opinion, what kind of summer program should be provided to Susan/Eric?

The second author served as moderator for the small group session times during which each group read their assigned portrait, discussed the questions, and recorded all responses within the group. Two of the four groups read each child's portraits and responded to the discussion questions independently, thus providing two independent sets of interpretations for each child's portrait. Subsequently, each group shared its interpretations with all participants: An alternating pattern of sharing was used to cover information on both students by sharing responses to each question from different groups. A final, general discussion ended the session, and the moderator asked additional questions as necessary throughout the process to expand on an issue or probe into an area being discussed. The total group sessions were audio-taped and transcribed for later analysis.

Following the session, the investigators shared general impressions about participants' opinions, afffect, and positions in a preliminary analysis of general internal consistency of the

responses to the Focus Group questions. The moderator reviewed and summarized the transcriptions and referred back to audio-taped portions of participants' responses to identify potential trends and patterns. Strongly held opinions and frequently held opinions were noted to inform "big ideas" of the data set (Krueger, 1994). Internal consistency of participant responses was analyzed to determine to what extent opinions and positions evolved during group discussions. Consistent trends and patterns in participants' responses informed "big ideas" that framed their positions and feelings to the Focus Group questions.

Results

In response to the first and second questions, the prevalent or "big ideas" and feelings expressed by Focus Group participants in the four groups were as follows:

1. Compared to the class activities during the school year, the summer handicapped-only program lacked age-appropriate peers to interact with the target children. Thus, appropriate peer models and interactions were missing in the summer program;

2. The target children seemed to be socially motivated by their peers during the school year but not motivated in the summer program, since there were no peer interactions--seen as crucial to the maintenance of their skills and preventing skill regression;

3. The target children were more independent during the school year with their peers, but dependent on the teaching assistant during the summer program;

4. IEP goals and objectives were related to the skills of the target children during the school year, for example, independent feeding skills, but seemed missing during the summer because of the full assistance provided by the teaching assistant. Both target children received full physical support from the TAs during the summer program without the same level of

participation as shown during the school year programs.

5. The social environment within general education classrooms with age-appropriate peers was important to the children with severe disabilities. They learned skills by imitating and interacting with their peers. Their peers served as models for classmates with severe disabilities.

In response to the third question about optimal summer programs for the target children, the majority of the participants' responses emphasized exploring options for community-based recreation summer programs and family-needed summer activities attended by children with and without disabilities. For instance, participants mentioned community organized summer camps or those involving family members, in which all children with and without disabilities are able to participate. Some suggested school-based summer programs involving nondisabled children as peers for the children with severe disabilities.

Discussion

Quality inclusive schooling has been proposed as an educational service delivery model for students with disabilities in order to insure that both the educational and social needs of these young people are met. The relationship between classroom ecology (contexts of classrooms and the classroom activities) and occurrences of social behavior of children may be highly correlated, such that the events of the classroom as they are structured by the teacher and the situation have an impact upon children's social interactions (Odom, Peterson, McConnell, & Ostrosky, 1990). While self-contained classrooms do provide opportunities for one-to-one instruction and responses to children's communication bids by adults, there is evidence that such responses are less than one might expect. Houghton, Bronicki, and Guess (1987) reported that in self-contained classrooms for 37 students with severe disabilities in three different settings

(institutions, public schools, and university lab schools), staff responded to very low rates of student-initiated expressions of preference and choice in both structured and unstructured classroom activities. Cole and Meyer (1991) found, in their comparison of handicapped-only versus integrated programs, that children with severe disabilities in segregated programs spent more time with therapists, (obviously) less time with other children, less time with the teaching assistant, equal amounts of time with the special education teacher, and more time alone doing nothing in comparison to their developmentally matched peers in integrated settings.

As our examples illustrate, the portraits included evidence of the range of positive and negative activities and behaviors from both programs to balance overall impressions. However, the target children's portraits did clearly reveal more opportunities for communication exchanges between children with severe disabilities and others during the school year in comparison to the ESY summer program, particularly with other children. The general education classroom includes classmates who are fluent communicators and can initiate, respond, and support or accommodate the student with disaiblities within naturally occurring functional classroom routines, activities, and social networks throughout the school day. The organization of the classroom offers an additional context for increasing social interactions between children with and without disabilities (Brady, McEvoy, Gunter, Shore, & Fox, 1984).

During the academic year observations, Susan and Eric were exposed to and fully participated in a variety of grouping arrangements and classroom contexts that required and/or allowed for acquisition, fluency building, and maintenance on a variety of behaviors and skills related to social competence. In contrast to the rich array of opportunities offered in the general education environment, their summer programs provided primarily opportunities to comply to

adult requests and demands in a social communicative environment that was virtually devoid of conversational models other than teacher directions, prompting, encouragements, and error corrections (i.e., mands, reinforcement, and tacts). The children with disabilities did not interact behaviorally, socially, or communicatively with one another, and their overall activity level was regarded as greatly diminished by their teachers; specifically, the special education teacher in the summer who was also one of the inclusion teachers during the school year spoke about the children "having almost shut down" communicatively during the summer. The Focus Group participants commented that, in their opinion, IEP objectives could not be met in the summer program because the typical peers they followed were missing.

Inclusive programs have been promtoed for their enhanced opportunities to support social-communicative behavior and to develop friendships and other valued personal relationships with peers. Recently, the child development literature has emphasized the importance of social context--interactions with peers and others--for the development of cognitive as well as social-communicative skills. This "new" direction has been heavily influenced by the writings of the Russian theoriest Lev Vygotsky in particular (Vygotsky, 1978), although social ecologists have long argued that social context has an important impact upon learning the many skills and behaviors needed to adjust to and become a member of one's cultural group and society (Barker, 1968). In fact, theorists such as Tharp and Gallimore (1989) view social context as far more than an opportunity to enhance learning, and maintain instead that the social influences of the classroom, the school, and our society are primary in determining whether we effectively support children's development.

The two children's portraits reveal a significantly richer social context in the inclusive

programs these young people experienced during the academic year than that experienced during the summer months. Whether such differences do relate functionally to regression and recoupment outcomes may not be an answer that can be derived through empirical analysis, given the complexity and number of individual outcomes targeted on different children's IEPs (cf. Alper, Parker, Schloss, & Wisienski, 1993; Barton, Johnson, & Brulle, 1986; Browder, 1991; Edgar, Spence, & Kenowitz, 1977). Logically, the social context and process of services and supports provided to children should have an impact upon the retention of important skills and behaviors. What the ESY handicapped-only setting could conceivably accomplish best would be the maintenance of personal self-care skills identified on the student's IEP, although this issue might also be challenged by the degree of assistance actually provided by the teaching assistant in the self-contained program. Even an individualized skill domain such as mobility is likely to be influenced by social (movement) context with nondisabled peers.

Our Focus Group participants were sufficiently interested in inclusion to voluntarily attend a conference on the topic. Thus, they do not represent the opinions of all family members and professional staff focused upon students with severe disabilities. But we would maintain that our Focus Group participants do represent the constituents of those students who are enrolled in inclusive academic year school programs as they would have participated in the design of the student's IEP. Thus, they would seem to be the appropriate respondents for our research question. Wild and Liacopoulos (1988) found some dissatisfaction among parents and other consumers with ESY services, particularly when the ESY services were seen as not consistent and continuous with regular school year services. The original entitlement for a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities was based upon the entitlement

for children without disabilities--a societal judgment that children should attend school. Perhaps an appropriate summer entitlement for students with disabilities should also look to the experiences of same-age peers for direction. If peers (and friends from school) are not in school during the summer break but are instead participating in other summer activities, those same activities might be the ESY opportunities of choice for children with disabilities. As our Focus Groups emphasized, alternative, community-based, family-needed summer program options might be more consistent with both the regression-recoupment intent of the ESY entitlement as well as lifestyle expectations for children in the summer. If children are judged to be benefitting from an inclusive school year program, segregated summer school seems an unfortunate and unnecessarily restrictive step backward.

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Table 1. Information on Child Participants

Child	Ages[a]	Disability	Services Provided[b]	IEP Goals (1993)	Placement Spring '93	Placement Fall '93
Eric	7-8	Multiple (cerebral palsy, uses a wheelchair)	OT, PT, Speech	1. Personal Care: Self-feeding, toileting. 2. Leisure activity with peer. 3. Reading Readiness and letter identification. 4. Numbers 0-10 and coin identification. 5. Communication board skills and "yes/no" answers to questions. 6. Increase motor and recreation skills.	Grade 1 (Inclusion)	Grade 2 (Inclusion)
Susan	6-7	Multiple (cerebral palsy, uses a wheelchair)	OT, PT, Speech	1. Personal Care: self-feeding, toileting. 2. Conversations with peers using her communication device. 3. Spell name and identify 10 sight words. 4. Identify numbers 0-10. 5. Select learning center and initiate peer interactions. 6. Increase motor and recreation skills. 7. Use writing tool at table top (crayon).	Kindergarten (Inclusive)	Grade 1 (Inclusive)

[a]Ages across study phases.

[b]In addition to maximum level of special education services and supports, including sharing teacher assistant and special education Methods & Resource Teacher time.